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Writing Mode Reflections

**Reflection on Expressive Writing**

We have discussed the theory that expression is our earliest and easiest mode of writing. Perhaps that is true in the early development of our writing, but I have found that since I have become an adult – and that was unfortunately at too early of an age – expressive writing has been difficult for me to embrace. I have tried to keep a journal for years. It is always at the top of my New Years’ resolution list, and never makes it past January 3. The closest I came was after our trip to England, where I committed to keeping a daily journal until our reunion. I hoped the euphoria of the trip would finally break my writer’s block. With the outside noise and distractions that seems to define my life these days, my entries became shorter and less focused, and lacked the power and voice I wanted to achieve. The “idea” of expressive writing is very satisfying to me; I want it to be something I go to for comfort and peace, but I worry too much about perfection to let it serve that purpose.   
 One of the main elements of expressive writing is a sense of authenticity. It has to be writing that is believable and born out of real experience. It requires personality, an unfettered glimpse of truth through the writer’s eyes. Expression must reflect honesty. Therefore, risk taking is a natural component of this mode. Although honesty can get one into trouble, I do not simply mean risk taking means telling something one believes is true to an audience who may not want to hear it; rather, risk taking with expressive writing grows from being honest with yourself. We are conditioned to sugarcoat experiences, to hide feelings, to turn the other cheek, and to acquiesce to what we ought to say, not necessarily what our hearts tell us we must say.  
 So, the problem that remains is that expressive writing requires the writer to have enough control to let go of those boundaries, to lose the control that keeps the page blank in fear of judgment or facing the mirror. As humans, I believe the most precious knowledge we have is the knowledge of our own heart. That is often the most difficult content to put into words. Even the sensation of standing on London’s famed Tower Bridge, touching where the blue paint has chipped off an immense pillar that, in itself, looks so miniscule in the postcards and realizing that I am just a small, temporary sojourner on this bustling bridge, these things cannot be fully expressed. Of course, I can try and you can always find good words that paint a vivid picture. Still, I know how mesmerized I was by the experience and still cannot find the correct way to express what I felt at that moment.  
 Expressive writing requires belief in me: belief that the words I select are the precise and do justice to the experience. Perfection is ever-elusive, and I tend to look for those perfect phrases and words that clearly define what I want to reveal. In the end, expressive writing requires self-reflection that cannot wait on perfection, but simply putting thoughts on paper and letting the heart talk while the mind listens. There’s always hope for the next New Year’s Day.

**Reflection on Expository Writing**

Connect the dots. We are barraged daily by explanations, justifications, reasons for why everything is – and must be – as it is. We need that explanation, that satisfaction that everything makes sense. Even in the classroom, the bulk of our teaching of writing is preparing for one writing assessment or preparing students for the analytical essays they will write in college. Ideas must be in order and the movement must flow seamlessly.   
 Expository writing is communicative by nature. It is meant to convince, define, and to inform. The factor that makes all of exposition work is purpose. There must be a point, a main idea on which every spotlight shines. A clearly define idea requires precision and planning. In my own expository writing, organization is a critical component. I like to physically put the ideas in front of me and manipulate them. The placement of a sentence or the breaking of a paragraph in just the right location can influence how writing is understood and received by the audience. I like to create an outline or plan where I can see specifically how my points connect. With that comes the challenge of movement. Transitions within expository texts make the connection and relevance happen.   
 Details are another key factor in producing good exposition. In order to understand or to be persuaded, the reasons must be poignant. Good general ideas only become powerful when they are followed by specific details that prove their worth. Details answer the “so what?” question of expository texts, where the reader must connect the facts and ideas to a notion that is relevant and important. So much vies for our attention all the time. We miss out on important information because we are so attuned to the ideas that already have us hooked. The real job of the writer is to find the appeal and the rationale that explains their perspective clearly, vividly, and logically.

**Reflection on Poetic Writing**

Poetry is a mode in which I’m uneasily comforted. It is a release: a place where daydreams and reality meet and meld perfectly. It requires letting ideas flow without having to worry about honesty and accuracy. Poetry creates its own reality, one in which the poet and reader may both lose themselves in the moment of the experience and find comfort and familiarity. In essence, the purpose of poetry is to express feelings and experiences in a way that helps guide others to similar thoughts. It is magnetic and manipulative all at once, because within a poem, there is message that is confluent and divergent from our own making of meaning.  
 As a writer, I find poetry to be the place where I begin to express myself. Still, a stumbling block for me, as with other types of expression, is finding the right word or phrase that paints the correct image as I see it. Understanding imagery as being multisensory is important. Taste, texture, sound, and smell are all capable of stirring one’s emotions on a grand scale. Careful poets create an existence where words, instead of physical stimuli, create and define meaning.   
 I have to be in a certain mood or situation to write poetry. I must have the space to think, to consider the possibilities, to become frustrated, and return to my original idea. To me, writing poetry is like a logic puzzle where the initial idea always provides a base and support that can withstand all of the deletions and margin markings. I also like to draft poetry, leave it, and return to it later with a fresh perspective. Above all, poetry requires imagination, allowing us to see reality with new eyes.

**Summary Essay on Myself as a Writer**

Perhaps the most important lesson we were supposed to learn from our writing journey this summer was that the different modes of writing are not so distinct from one another that we should allow our biases and preferences hold us back from regularly practicing any of them. As I have reflected on my own experiences as a writer within these three modes, my mind kept coming back to a common theme – a thread that seemed to weave intuitively throughout. Writing is about creating an experiential bond between the writer and the reader.

Expressive writing takes our experience and causes us to answer the question of how it is meaningful to ourselves. Exposition requires us to convey how experience should be meaningful to others. Furthermore, poetry creates a shared experience where neither the writer nor reader need to feel and understand the same thing, but find inspiration through the words. The bond between writer and reader is always an act of communication. Writing is more than just a form of presenting ideas; it always reaches for and demands relationship.

Maintaining focus is an important skill that serves a critical function in all three modes. There must always be a purpose that undergirds good writing, even if the subject matter is whimsical or casual. Words too cannot be treated lightly. Even the powerfully placed word or thoughtful single detail can redefine an idea or enliven a story.

Practically, I tend to favor expository writing. It is straightforward and can be comfortably formulaic at times. However, it does not nearly gratify me as much as poetry. The writing that means the most to me are the poems that express feelings and nuances of thought beyond mere imagery. When I write poetry, I look to add layers of meaning to enhance the significance of the moment. It is fine if other readers never make the connection, because I trust they would find their own interpretation. Expressive writing is the most difficult to me. Here, I am both defendant and jury – writer and audience. I admit that among the three modes, expression is where I can be myself, but that always seems to lead me to the recurring realization that my ideas are worthy, have significance, and do not need to be perfect in order to be valuable.

As a writer, I find myself constantly longing for the right words, a frustrating dilemma that is abated only by a satisfying word or phrase here or there. I have learned to be more open-minded as a writer, to take risks and plunge into the icy sea of possible criticism. I recall my writing apprehension to be fairly high, because I resist judgment and evaluation. Part of the apprehension comes from the fact that people say my writing is good, and praise is hard for me to digest, just as much as I fear rejection. I have always tried to please people, but never for the purpose of having a spotlight on me. As a writer, as much as in life, I continue to search for and understand my audience—and myself.